

CITY OF SEATTLE

ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**SEPA Threshold Determination
for
Lease of Former Fire Station 6 to Africatown Community Land Trust**

DRAFT

Project Sponsor: City of Seattle

Location of Proposal: 101 23rd Ave. S, Seattle.
King County Parcel number: 982670-1650

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

The City of Seattle proposes to enter a 99-year lease with Africatown Community Land Trust (ACLT) for the activation and reuse of the former Fire Station 6 property as a community center use. ACLT will provide direct technical assistance services to support small businesses, employment training, and will conduct administrative functions on the site. No new development or exterior alteration of the fire station structure are proposed as a part of this action.

The following approval is required pursuant to SEPA - Environmental Determination - Chapter 25.05, Seattle Municipal Code.

PROPOSAL BACKGROUND

The City owns real property located in Seattle's Central Area that includes a historic building formerly known as Fire Station 6 located at 101 23rd Ave. S. The property is 20,400 sq. ft. with an 8,130 sq. ft. former fire station structure on site. The site is currently used only for storage of vehicles and is surplus to the City's needs. The City and ACLT mutually desire to activate Fire Station 6 and develop it into the William Grose Center, a community center facility. The City proposes to enter a lease with a 99-year term with ACLT for the property. The lease requires

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approval by the Mayor and City Council. ACLT will perform technical support functions on site to support local community-based small businesses. ACLT will occupy the existing fire station structure, including upgrades to interior building features and systems. No exterior construction is proposed by this action for the near-term, which is estimated to be approximately 5 years. In addition to the small business technical support function, ACLT expects to host temporary community events and gatherings on the property.

ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Relationship to Plans and Policies

The site is located in the 23rd & Union-Jackson Urban Village and is identified as “Residential Urban Village” on the Future Land Use Map. There are numerous goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan, and the Central Area Neighborhood Plan that are relevant to this proposal. Several of these policies reference: a need for concentrating growth in urban villages, for strengthening community, for providing employment opportunities, and for the adaptive reuse of historic structures. The proposal would implement each of these policy directives by providing a community-based economic development-focused community center, within an existing historic structure inside of an urban village. Not every comprehensive plan and neighborhood plan policy can be addressed directly in the space of this environmental determination. Below, particularly relevant policies that demonstrate consistency between the proposal and the plans are referenced. Other policies were reviewed and found not to conflict with the proposal.

Particularly Relevant City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan Policies

- **GS 1.2** Encourage investments and activities in urban centers and urban villages that will enable those areas to flourish as compact mixed-use neighborhoods designed to accommodate the majority of the city’s new jobs and housing.
- **GS 1.6** Plan for development in urban centers and urban villages in ways that will provide all Seattle households, particularly marginalized populations, with better access to services, transit, and educational and employment opportunities.
- **LU G1** Achieve a development pattern consistent with the urban village strategy, concentrating most new housing and employment in urban centers and villages, while also allowing some infill development compatible with the established context in areas outside centers and villages.
- **GS 2.4** Work toward a distribution of growth that eliminates racial and social disparities by growing great neighborhoods throughout the city, with equitable access for all and with community stability that reduces the potential for displacement.
- **LU 14.4** Encourage the adaptive reuse of designated landmark structures by allowing uses in these structures that may not otherwise be allowed under the applicable zoning, provided such action is approved by the Landmarks Preservation Board.

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Below are some, but not all, of the goals and policies in the Central Area Neighborhood Plan element of the Comprehensive Plan that are particularly relevant to this proposal and demonstrate consistency with plans.

Particularly relevant Central Area Neighborhood Plan Policies

- **CA-P1** Strengthen a unique identity for the Central Area that celebrates its culture, heritage, and diversity; enhance the sense of community; and increase the feeling of pride among Central Area residents, business owners, employees, and visitors through excellent physical and social environments.
- **CA-P2** Recognize the historical importance and significance of the Central Area's existing housing stock, institutional buildings (old schools, etc.), and commercial structures as community resources. Incorporate their elements into building design and possible designation of historic and cultural resources.
- **CA-P8** Support existing and new Central Area community programs and expand on existing partnerships so these programs prioritize services to those who consider the Central Area to be central to their identity, such as the African American community.
- **CA-P35** Support efforts to encourage existing and new minority and locally owned businesses in the Central Area to grow and expand.
- **CA-P36** Support implementation of coordinated long-term strategies to improve commercial districts including support for existing or expanding small businesses and ethnically based businesses in order to maintain the multicultural character.
- **CA-P43** Provide opportunities and support to facilitate start-up small businesses.
- **CA-P49** Provide all Central Area youth with required skills and experience needed for future careers. Maximize the capability of local institutions and program providers such as Seattle Vocational Institute to serve such needs.

The 23rd Avenue Action Plan is another plan that was prepared by community and adopted by the City in 2017. Although the Action Plan does not directly address the Fire Station 6 site, extensive sections of the plan call for actions consistent with the community center use that would result from this proposal. Particularly relevant plan actions can be found under the “A Great Business Community”, and the “A Place That Supports a Healthy and Stable Community” sections.

It is important to emphasize that the mission of ACLT is to work for community ownership of land in the Central District that can support the cultural and economic thriving of people who are part of the African diaspora in the Greater Seattle region. The proposed lease and community center use under the purview of ACLT would directly implement several of the comprehensive and neighborhood plan goals that speak to the identity, heritage and culture of the Central Area, including CA-P1, CA-P2, CA-P8, and GS 2.4.

Given the location of the site in the 23d & Union-Jackson Urban Village and the circumstances of the site and property adaptive reuse, this proposal is considered to be generally consistent with the

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City's plans and policies. Consequently, no adverse impacts related to existing plans or policies would result from the proposal.

Land Uses and Development Patterns

The current use of the site is as occasional parking for city vehicles. The proposed use is a community center with the functions described above and in the SEPA checklist. The SEPA checklist describes the adjacent land uses in the vicinity, which include a library, Catholic Community Services offices, and residential uses in the historic Yesler Houses, and 4-story multi-family apartment buildings. As noted above the site is within a designated urban village and the existing zoning is the Lowrise 3 (LR3) multifamily zone.

The proposed community center use would be compatible and consistent with both the surrounding existing uses, planned urban village land use and the existing zoning designation. Urban villages are locations where a wide variety of institutional, commercial and multi-family residential land use are encouraged. Community Center uses of the proposed size are an allowed small institutional use in the existing LR3 zone. The intensity of the uses and activities that would occur in the William Grose Center would be similar to those that take place across the street at Catholic Community Services, and the Douglass Truth Library. The intensity of use would not significantly impact multifamily residential populations in the vicinity. Land use impact analysis for a potential future development on the site would be conducted at the time that a specific redevelopment proposal is known.

The existing fire station is primarily a one-story structure that is approximately 30' at its tallest point. No development is proposed as part of this action that would increase the scale of structures on site. The existing structure is a lower scale of development than allowed by the current LR3 zone which features a 50' height limit. If future redevelopment proceeds at a future time the development would be evaluated for its land use impact and would have to comply with whatever zone's development standards are in place at the time.

Based on the facts summarized above, this proposal will have no significant impact on the land use and development pattern.

Height/Bulk/Scale, Aesthetics, Shadows and Views

The SEPA checklist notes that there is no redevelopment or exterior alteration of the fire station structure proposed as a part of this action. No views will be blocked, no shadows increased, and there will be no height bulk and scale impact.

It is acknowledged that at a future time, ACLT could pursue additional construction on site, including the potential construction of housing. However, at the time of this proposal neither the specific composition, scale or timeframe for potential future development on the site is known and can not be evaluated.

Noise, Light/Glare

The SEPA checklist identifies that an increased amount of activity on site could cause an increment of additional light and glare and noise consistent with reuse of the site as a community

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center. The amount of noise, light and glare during normal operation times would be minor, and fully consistent with the types of activities expected in an urban context in an urban village location. The incremental noise and light would be at the level associated with the use of a building by several employees in an office-type setting, and the coming and going of small groups of community members and business operators to the building to receive technical assistance. Not more than a minor impact is expected.

The SEPA checklist notes that ACLT expects to host occasional events, gatherings or festivals on the grounds of the site. Events are estimated to include 10 – 200 people. Moderate noise light and glare impacts could be associated with such events. The intermittent frequency of events, and the limited hours of events mitigate potential noise and glare impacts down to a lower level. The level of noise, light and glare would be consistent with amounts expected within an urban context in an urban village location. No significant impact is anticipated.

Housing

There is no housing on site, and therefore no potential for direct displacement or demolition of housing. The proposal to lease the facility to ACLT and the proposed community center use within the existing structure includes no housing. However, the SEPA checklist suggests that at an unknown future time ACLT could pursue the construction of rent-and income-restricted affordable housing on the site. The quantity and configuration of future potential housing is not known at the time of this proposal. Since no housing is being eliminated, and the specifics of a potential future housing proposal are not known at this time, there is no adverse impact on housing associated with this proposal.

Environmentally sensitive areas

The SEPA checklist indicates that the City of Seattle's environmentally critical areas GIS maps show an isolated steep slope at the south border of the property adjacent to the neighboring residential structure. This steep slope is typical of the types of embankments and grading that occurs at the perimeters of many sites in an urban environ. No exterior construction or redevelopment is proposed as a part of this action. There would be no disturbance or alteration of the slope. At a future time if development is proposed measures to address the sloped area would be undertaken and evaluated as part of permitting.

Given the facts described above, no adverse impact to environmentally sensitive areas would occur from this proposal.

Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources

The SEPA checklist identifies that the fire station structure is a designated City of Seattle Landmark. The nomination of Fire Station 6 was one of eight local landmark nominations submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Board for existing fire stations built by the City of Seattle in the 1920s and 1930s. The building was designated as a City Landmark as per Ordinance No. 122462. The exterior of the building is largely unaltered from its original condition and it features a distinctive Art Deco style façade. No physical alteration to the

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exterior of the structure or new development is proposed as a part of this action. Therefore, no direct adverse impact to the historical landmark is anticipated.

This action transfers oversight of the building and grounds to ACLT for a long 99-year term. ACLT intends to occupy the interior of the fire station structure as a community center use in the near term, but also has intentions over a longer term to seek more intensive reuse of the property that could include additional development that would have the potential to alter the landmark structure or the landmark's context and setting. Therefore, there is some increased risk of adverse impact to the historic nature of the site associated with the proposal. Since the site is already a designated City Landmark though, any alteration of the exterior architecture or significant alteration of the buildings' grounds must undergo review by the Landmark Preservation Board, and would require a Certificate of Approval from the Board for alterations. The Landmarks Preservation regulations are the City's strongest regulatory protection for historic preservation and are designed to mitigate impact on historic resources. Since landmark protections are in place and would apply at the time of a future development proposal no significant adverse impact would occur from this proposal.

Cultural preservation is another aspect of the proposal. The Central Area is among Seattle's most prominent historically Black/African American neighborhoods. In recent decades, the proportion of the Central Area's population that is Black/African American has markedly declined. ACLT's mission and proposed use of the site would be intended to help stabilize and support a diverse array of locally-owned businesses including Black/African-American-owned businesses that serve Black/African American cultural communities. Therefore the proposal will have a positive impact towards the goal of cultural preservation as articulated in adopted city policies like **CA-P8:** Support existing and new Central Area community programs and expand on existing partnerships so these programs prioritize services to those who consider the Central Area to be central to their identity, such as the African American community.

Based on the analysis of potential impacts above and in the SEPA checklist, no significant adverse impact on historic or cultural resources will result from the proposal.

Transportation, Parking

The checklist provides an overview of the transportation access to the site. The site is at the intersection of E. Yesler Way – a minor arterial road, and 23rd Ave. S. – a principal arterial road. E. Yesler Way has a dedicated bicycle lane. King County Metro Transit routes 8 and 27 are on E. Yesler Way and routes 4 and 48 are on 23rd Ave. S. Both streets have improved sidewalks. These facilities provide adequate transportation access to the site, and the small increment of additional demand on the transportation system from the expected employees and community member customers on site will not exceed levels already evaluated in transportation plans and studies. No significant impact on the transportation network will result from this proposal.

Change to a community center use could potentially have an impact on parking in the area. SMC title 23 includes a parking requirement for the use of one space per 350 sq. ft. of floor area. There are exceptions to minimum parking requirement for a variety of circumstances including the reuse of a landmark structure. The exact quantity of parking required and provided on site will

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be identified during building permit review. The site already has capacity for on site parking in front of and to the rear of the structure. The exact quantity of parking spaces depends on final design and configuration and is not clear at the time of this proposed lease. It is possible that the new use could cause some increased demand for on-street parking on nearby streets such as E. Yesler Way, S. Main St., or 22nd Ave. S.

There are a variety of transportation modal options in the area as described above. Limited availability of onsite parking or nearby street parking can encourage selection of alternative modes of transportation, which is an outcome that is consistent with the City's transportation policies, especially for urban village locations. Therefore, even if there is some incremental increased demand or constraint for on-street parking caused by this proposal, the City does not consider that result to be a significant adverse impact. No significant adverse impacts to transportation and parking area anticipated.

Public Services, Utilities

The City's existing regulations requiring improvements to utilities at the time of development would not be altered by this proposal. It is expected that the community center use would use existing utility connections and existing utilities that are available in the public rights of ways adjacent to the site. Required utility work associated with potential future development projects would likely be sufficient to address any localized needs for utility improvement.

The property is not currently serving a role for the Seattle Fire Department and therefore the site is surplus to the city's needs. A new updated fire station 6 was constructed at 405 Martin Luther King Jr. Way South in 2012, which serves the fire and emergency response needs of the immediate area. The range of potential impacts on emergency services, compared to those estimated as part of past studies, are not likely to be discernably altered. No more than a minor impact on emergency services or utilities would result.

Parks and Open Space

The affected parcels meet goals in the 2017 Parks Gap Analysis for walkability to parks. Due to the very small amount of the incremental demand for park usage and the undefined timing and degree of additional demand on parks associated with future phases of the proposal, the overall impact on parks and open space is determined not to be significant.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Plants & Animals, Air Quality, Earth, Water (Drainage & Water Quality), Environmental Health

There is a cluster of mature trees at the south edge of the site in and around the sloped area. None of the trees are known to be exceptional. No removal of trees is proposed as part of this action. No exterior construction, grading or alteration of drainage patterns is proposed.

The proposal would not alter any Federal, State or City environmental protections. Existing regulations including the City's stormwater code, shoreline master program, and other

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regulations would address impacts to plants, animals, air quality, earth, and water at the time of potential future development. The magnitude of the potential impact stemming from this proposal is determined not be significant.

Energy and Natural Resources

The proposal would not alter any Federal, State or City energy standards or natural resource protections. Existing regulations including the building code, energy code, and other regulations will apply to any construction or adaptive reuse of the existing structure. It is expected that tenant improvements associated with the conversion to a community center would improve the energy performance of the building relative to its existing function. Energy and building codes would also address energy impacts or impacts to natural resources at the time of potential future development. The magnitude of the potential impact stemming from this proposal is determined not be significant.

DECISION

Based on a review of the SEPA environmental checklist and associated documents, and the analysis of impact described above the following threshold determination is rendered:

- [X] Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).
- [] Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

Signature: [On file] Date: 8/03/2020
Geoff Wentlandt
Office of Planning and Community Development